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ABSTRACT

The New England Consortium criteria of excellence are 26 statements of conditions which describe a quality reading program and which must exist if all children are to learn to read. These statements are grouped under five goal areas, the third of which, staffing a reading program, is treated in this position paper. The paper supports attainment of the following criteria for this goal area: the board of education has designated someone within the school system who has the central office support, responsibility, and time for the development and maintenance of a quality reading program; the board of education actively seeks candidates with preparation in the teaching of reading when filling new positions; the local board of education has established an incentive program for teacher inservice education in reading; and there is a continuous program of staff development. (JM)

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Staffing a Reading Program

A Position Paper

of the
New England Consortium
for the Right to Read

September 1976

CS 003 043

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Introduction

The New England Consortium Criteria of Excellence are twenty-six statements of conditions that describe a quality reading program. These conditions must exist if all children are to learn to read. The relative quality of a program may be judged by determining the degree to which it meets these standards.

The statements are grouped under five goal areas, as shown below:

The New England Consortium Criteria of Excellence
Goal Areas

A. Community and School Climate
B. Organizing and Managing a Reading Program
C. Staffing a Reading Program
D. Selecting and Utilizing Materials
E. Fostering Reading Interests

The position taken in this paper supports attainment of the criteria in Goal C: Staffing a Reading Program, as listed below:

1. The board of education has designated someone within the school system who has the central office support, responsibility, and time for the development and maintenance of a quality reading program.
2. The board of education actively seeks candidates with preparation in the teaching of reading when filling new positions.
3. The local board of education has established an incentive program for teacher inservice education in reading.
4. There is a continuous program of staff development.

This position paper is provided to assist school personnel in developing a rationale for and in planning programs and activities that meet these criteria.

STAFFING A READING PROGRAM

The teaching of reading was once a rather uncomplicated procedure. For most persons, a modest level of skill development met the normal demands of life, and all were not expected to learn to read. Even without reading ability, success was possible in many areas of endeavor. But now, literacy demands on the individual are increasing each day. No longer is it possible to get and hold a good job; participate in our political system; play the part of an intelligent consumer; or satisfy one's social, emotional and intellectual needs for information without this ability. Life is more complex. There is more to learn and more reason for learning it than once was true.

Today the development of an intelligent citizenry, so essential to the future of our society, depends upon universal literacy. As a result, the public is indicating to school personnel that a higher level of reading skill development is expected. Reading instruction is becoming a major focus of the school enterprise. One sees that the more essential the ability to read becomes to the public as a goal of education, the more important its teaching function becomes.

In view of the greater importance given to the teaching of reading in recent years, more attention is now being paid to the staffing of reading programs. In addressing this topic, the position taken in this paper is that *a reading program should be staffed by personnel, sufficient in number and competence, to meet the reading needs of students in terms of the philosophy and goals established by the school-community.*

The paper will include four sections: 1) determining a staffing pattern, 2) hiring a competent staff, 3) maintaining a competent staff and 4) recommendations.

Determining a Staffing Pattern

Many professional staffs have faced the problem of determining how many and what kind of reading teachers/specialists it would take to adequately cope with the reading needs of students in their schools. In the years since 1965, the problem has often been solved by writing a proposal for outside funding. This was not a negative approach. The purpose of federal and state funding has been and still is, in many instances, to provide opportunities for schools to try out new programs with the implicit understanding that those proving to be successful will be maintained on local funds after the original development period is over. Many of the remedial reading programs in existence today originated in this manner.

The fact that these programs developed as supplements to the reading program was often to meet a funding source stipulation that they not supplant classroom instruction. Although there has been no requirement to meet this stipulation when local funding was used, the federal program model has often been adopted because it is familiar. It is time now, with over ten years experience, in most cases, in using this model, to review the current status of reading programs in terms of our philosophy and goals. Are we doing a better job of teaching reading? Are we turning out thoughtful, motivated readers? Are we reducing the incidence of reading failure each year? Are we reducing the need for remedial/corrective programs?

Remedial reading programs are expensive; one reading specialist can service only twenty-five to thirty disabled readers adequately. What is more serious a problem is that a student must fail in order to gain entry to the program. No helping hand is offered until the failure has been documented.

It is obvious that there are questions about "remedial reading" as a solution to the school reading problem. Furthermore, after many years of operating such programs it is often found that there are as many disabled readers as ever. While individual students selected for supplementary work may have benefited, school systems are still producing reading failures at an alarming rate. The spin-off from the employment of reading specialists (where available) to operate these programs has had few salutary effects on the systems themselves.

It is contended here that reading specialists in the employ of the school should be moving the school toward lasting solutions to reading problems. It is neither economically feasible nor humanistically acceptable to maintain classroom programs that produce student rejects — it has been estimated that fifteen percent of the student population, on the average, is reading disabled — and then to set up expensive corrective procedures to attempt to undo the damage. While it is possible to reteach skills in more appropriate ways in a remedial setting, it is never entirely possible to make up for the learning that failed to take place during the reading disabled period, nor to completely erase the negative self-concept that develops during periods of failure. Schools need a staffing model that will make better use of the professional expertise of reading specialists. And it should be made clear that the aim is not so much to eliminate remedial reading as a component of the reading program as it is to pull it into a grand design where the upgrading of the classroom program receives greater priority, reducing the role of remedial reading, as a solution to the many reading problems that exist, to a supportive and much less extensive function.

In the sections that follow immediately below, the various roles played by reading educators and paraprofessionals in school systems are described and then suggestions are made for assessing staffing needs for a particular school system.

Reading educator roles. In the staffing of the school district reading program, four possible roles* may be played:

1) the person who instructs students in developmental reading, including reading in the content fields;
2) the person who instructs students in remedial/corrective reading;
3) the person who provides reading consultant service to school personnel; and
4) the person who organizes, manages, budgets and develops community support for the reading program. It should be noted here that it is a rather common practice for one person to be assigned two or more of the above roles; e.g., Roles 2 and 3 or Roles 3 and 4.

Role 1. Persons in Role 1 are classroom teachers. They may be teaching in a self-contained classroom, an open classroom, a departmentalized or other organization. They may be using materials developed primarily for instructing students in basic reading skills, or they may be using print materials to teach content subjects such as literature, social studies, industrial arts or mathematics. Role 1 persons are responsible for teaching students some aspect of the general educational program. They diagnose and prescribe for students assigned them to assure continuous progress on the educational goals and objectives for which they are responsible.

Role 2. Persons in Role 2 work with students individually or in small groups to correct or remediate a reading difficulty. They may use regular classroom approaches or clinical approaches as each individual student's needs indicates. They may work with students in the classroom setting or schedule them to attend a reading center for specified periods.

The students they work with may be retarded readers for one or more reasons. The problem may be simple retardation or irregular skill development due to an inappropriate program, inadequate teaching, long illness, frequent change of schools or programs, etc. At the other

*Recommended standards for the professional preparation of persons assigned one or more of these roles have been published jointly by the New England Reading Association and the New England Consortium for the Right to Read. Contact your state Right to Read director for further information.

extreme, the problems experienced by students in their charge may be due to a preceptual or neurological deficit requiring a complete reading analysis with attention given to learning modalities, perceptual development, and strengths and interests upon which to build. The great majority, perhaps 90 percent, of reading referrals for special help fall in the first category with only a small minority needing a detailed case-study approach.

Persons in Role 2 are responsible to the classroom teacher for: 1) reporting diagnostic findings, the prognosis and program recommendations, 2) working out a cooperatively planned remedial/corrective program with the classroom teacher to bring about maximum student growth, and 3) maintaining on-going communications with the classroom teacher to assure that the classroom and the remedial/corrective program continue to supplement one another to assure continuous progress and mastery learning of essential skills for all students in their charge.

Role 3. Persons in Role 3 provide reading consultant services to school personnel. They help classroom teachers to self-evaluate and upgrade their teaching skills, provide inservice programs to bring about general improvement in the reading program, assist classroom teachers in diagnosing and prescribing for students with special needs, recommend appropriate placement in and utilization of reading materials, provide guidance in the use of test data and flexible grouping procedures, maintain a close check on the continuous progress of each student and help teachers to feel competent, effective and successful in their chosen field. These and other consultant services improve the way a reading program operates in a school. In general, reading consultants are responsible to principals for upgrading the reading programs in schools by improving teacher competencies. *They do not evaluate teachers* as the posture of an evaluator is diametrically opposed to the process-helper stance of a consultant.

Role 4. Persons in Role 4 organize, manage, budget and develop community support for the reading program. They work with a task force to build a K-12 sequence of essential skills, assist in organizing and articulating the skills vertically through the stages of progress in the program, and horizontally coordinate the work of all of those personnel dealing with the teaching or application of reading skills at any given grade level or stage of progress. They assist the task force in developing a management system that tracks all students through the sequence of essential skills — bringing together all sources of reading status and progress data on the same student record. They budget for the reading program, giving particular attention to the appropriateness

of expenditures to the goals and objectives of the reading program with due consideration for the needs of the general and special populations served. In addition, they maintain contact with the community to keep its various segments aware of the continuing progress and needs of the reading program and, in turn, to apprehend changes in community aspirations and needs. Persons in this role are responsible for generating a good public relations program to keep the school and community in tune with regard to reading.

Paraprofessionals. Many supportive roles in the reading program are played by paraprofessionals. Teacher aides and volunteers who are trained and integrated into the reading program assist teachers by providing additional adult-contact time to students who need extra help. While they are non-certified personnel and cannot, therefore, give initial instruction to students, they can supervise practice sessions, operate equipment, prepare reading games and other learning materials, review work that students need to go through again and provide opportunities for students to dramatize stories and put on puppet or marionnette shows. They can also read to students, listen to students read and help them select library books to stimulate interest in reading.

Paraprofessionals can be one of the best sources of assistance to teachers in coping with the major problem of teaching students that are organized into classes, and that is the wide variation in learning time required by students to master what is being taught. Since some students may require five to six times as long to master a fact or skill as others, the added help of a teacher aide or volunteer makes a significant difference in the amount of individualized help that can be given to those students who require so much more practice to ensure learning.

Assessing staffing needs. Staffing needs depend upon the program designed to help all students attain the goals and objectives established for the school reading program. The planning of a program should begin with a needs assessment followed by the establishment of priorities and then the formation of a long range plan. The ultimate aim should be to meet all reading needs of students in the regular school program.

In designing a program, consideration must be given to the strengths and weaknesses of both the staff and the student body. The person directing the planning process should see that enough flexibility is assured that everyone's needs can be accommodated. For example, a totally open school provides no place for those teachers and students

who cannot tolerate a lack of physical structure.

The first obvious staffing need is a qualified Role 4 specialist: someone to organize, manage, budget and develop community support for the program. Every school system needs a person assigned to Role 4, on a whole or part-time basis, depending upon the size of the school system, to lead the process of developing and carrying out a workable long-range plan with the administration and staff. In Right to Read school systems, this person is designated as the local Right to Read director. Other school systems may call this person the reading director, reading supervisor, reading coordinator, etc. This is a very important staff position.

The number of Role 3 specialists, or reading consultants, needed depends upon the competencies of the staff at the outset of the change process, the inservice requirements of the new plan and the amount of support that staff members need in order to break away from traditional ways of teaching and try approaches recommended in the new plan. Many persons fail to change for fear of making mistakes. A consultant can supply information and assurance to move the change process along more quickly. A consultant can also help teachers to adjust instruction to meet the needs of many of the students who are currently attending remedial/corrective reading classes.

In an ideal situation very few Role 2 specialists, remedial/corrective reading teachers, would be needed. Since a large proportion of reading disabled students are the product of an inadequate program or inappropriate teaching, each improvement in the classroom program should reduce failure among students and likewise reduce the need for supplementary instruction by specialists. However, there will always be a few students, perhaps three to five percent of the school population, who either require clinical approaches or suffer such severe retardation for non-school-related reasons that special help is needed. Compared with the 15 to 16 percent of the population, on the average, currently being serviced by specialists in many school systems, this would nevertheless represent a substantial reduction.

Role 1 personnel are the classroom teachers. It is currently recognized by teachers themselves as well as specialists in the field and others, including members of Congress, that teacher preparation in reading is totally inadequate in a majority of cases. It isn't the number of Role 1 persons (usually determined on a ratio basis by state or local regulation) so much as their preparation in reading that affects the instructional program. Every school system needs to work toward the most competent staff possible if the reading problem is to be solved.

Staffing needs can be assessed only after looking at the discrepancies between the strengths and weaknesses of teachers and students, on the one hand, and the goals of the program, on the other hand. Staffing patterns provide the human resources for carrying out the plan of action.

Hiring a Competent Staff

Hiring practices have undergone many changes in the last decade but still there persists a search for better ways to find and screen prospective staff members. Other fields have little to offer as a guide although sophisticated procedures have been tried in some cases.

Many of the old traditional screening devices such as grade point averages and transcripts have been found to be rather unproductive. Letters of recommendation are only as good as the conscientiousness of the undersigned. Observations of performance may yield more reliable information but are difficult to arrange.

The best process in usually the one that is locally determined by a carefully selected screening committee. The committee should represent administrators, classroom teachers, reading specialists, pupil services personnel who are expected to coordinate their services with the reading program and the community. Before the position to be filled is advertised, this committee should be brought together to review the job description and establish criteria for screening the candidates who might apply. (See the document, *Recommended Standards for Professional Preparation in Reading Education,* published jointly by the New England Reading Association and the New England Consortium for the Right to Read, 1976.)

Those candidates who meet the criteria should be interviewed by the screening committee to account for attitudes, interests, and personality factors that may have a bearing on job performance and the interpersonal relationships that are essential to success.

The screening committee may then choose to rate the candidates on the predetermined criteria and rank order them by tallying the ratings or to arrive at a rank order by consensus, if the latter seems more appropriate.The top three to five candidates may then be recommended to the administration for further review and action by the local board of education.

Far too frequently in the past, decisions on hiring staff have been made at the top administrative post with less than careful attention to criteria that are meaningful in terms of the job description and the social milieu within which the person will be working. Now there is movement in educational administration toward the establishment of policies that

have a rational base. Teachers are expecting a greater voice in the decision process; and hiring practices, as other areas of administrative concern, are giving way to a greater reliance on representative committee action as a more reasonable basis for decision-making.

Maintaining a Competent Staff

A continuous program of staff development is necessary to establish and operate a quality reading program. Programs offered should be directly related to the needs assessment data that was collected to provide a rationale for reading program development and to the specific objectives and activities outlined in the plan of action.

Staff development should not be a gun-shot program: book company consultants, available speakers, rented films, etc. in meaningless combination. Teachers are tired of that. There is little carryover for the money and time expended in such an effort.

To be meaningful, staff development must help teachers to reach program goals in a way that makes them feel most competent and successful. This requires careful planning and sequencing. Teachers who will be affected by the staff development program should be represented in the planning.

In determining where to begin the staff development program, consider first the priority needs of the program and the readiness of each staff member to move forward to meet those needs. Teachers themselves can best assess their personal needs for knowledge and skill; for example, the need for information about students' learning modalities. The task force building the plan of action on the other hand, can best assess overall staff needs related to new components to be introduced into the reading program; for example, the installation of a new management system. Staff development offerings of both types — program related and teacher related — should be coordinated and scheduled at a reasonable pace, considering the workload of the participants. Additional suggestions on staff development procedures and formats can be found in the *Right to Read State Directors Handbook: Part III, the Local Effort*, a USOE Right to Read publication. (Contact your state Right to Read director for a copy.)

Due to the program-related nature of the inservice programs being recommended, it is apparent that locally devised programs are best. Teachers today frequently pursue graduate work in specialized areas, providing them with competencies they may be willing to share. As a result, it may be found that all the talent needed by the staff can be found among its members, especially in those systems located near

institutions of higher education. When this is true, all that is needed is a catalyst to start the sharing process in motion. Teacher-planned sessions have a higher probability of meeting staff needs and are to be encouraged.

Many local boards of education have found that allowing released time for staff development and offering an incentive program, too, improve teacher attendance at sessions and increase enthusiasm. Both of these affect outcome and should be given consideration.

All of the professions suffer today from a sudden information overload, making it difficult for its members to keep abreast of current practice. The education profession is no exception. Just as the public would have great reservation about visiting a doctor who was unaware of new diagnostic procedures and/or new drugs and their uses, etc., so also is the public skeptical of educators who seem not to know why students are not learning to read and what approaches and materials can be prescribed to assist them. Enough information is available. There is no longer any reason to tolerate reading failure. With a well planned program and competent teachers, all students (with the possible exception of the one percent who are mentally defective) can learn to read. While there are no panaceas, the belief is becoming firmly implanted that teachers, reading specialists and administrators, working together, can build a program that allows both teachers and students to succeed. It is an exciting thought and well worth the process of program planning and staff development.

Recommendations

In conclusion, the following recommendations are made:

1. that the board of education designate a person for Role 4 so that a plan for reading improvement can be initiated

2. that the board of education adopt the standards recommended by the New England Reading Association and the New England Consortium for the Right to Read as minimum standards for hiring reading personnel

3. that reading specialists work toward permanent solutions to reading problems as well as helping individual students who have already failed

4. that a continuous program of staff development be planned that addresses the priority objectives resulting from the needs assessment and the competency needs of teachers to reach those objectives

5. that all administrators and staff consider the necessity of teaching all students to read for survival as well as self-fulfillment and work together to make total literacy a reality.